



A **Food Intolerance** is the inability to properly digest specific foods, usually specific to that individual's genetic make-up. Lactose intolerance, as stated in the Harvard health reference is the most common food intolerance, which is an intolerance to milk products. “As we get older, our ability to digest dairy decreases. That’s because, with age, our intestines make less of the enzyme (lactase) that processes lactose” (Harvard health, 2020). While these conditions are not life threatening, it can make those with it very uncomfortable. Avoidance of these causes would be one solution, though lactase pills actually exist to help people with drinking/eating milk products.. however they’re quite expensive.

A **Food Allergy** is our body’s inability of properly digesting certain foods, and in the case of ingesting something that we are allergic to (such as peanuts or seafood), it would cause our body’s immune system response activate, and depending on the type of allergic reaction, we would develop either rashes, swelling, light-headedness, problems breathing, and without the use of epinephrine in a short amount of time, could be fatal. (Harvard health, 2020)

Celiac disease is a disease that only affects about 1% of the western population (Harvard health, 2020). Gluten is the initiating factor for celiac, and while eating gluten every so often does not trigger major responses, eating it in prolonged periods can cause malnutrition, diarrhea and weight loss (Harvard health, 2020). Sometimes, however, some people might not have a horribly bad reaction to gluten, but instead it causes stomach pain, joint pain, fatigue, rashes and brain fog. (Harvard health, 2020)

There is no defined terminology to describe being able to digest everything, or to not be allergic or intolerable to anything digestible (by humans), so you would then be considered “immune” (or having all of the correct genetic markers) to all potential genetic and developmental “allergens” (For example, we should NOT be able to digest lactose after the age of ~5 years of age (Lactose comes from milk of breast, from either woman or cow / goat; you need to produce lactase to break down lactose), or some people may be allergic to peanuts and seafood throughout the entirety of their life due to genetic variability. Sometimes we can also GAIN these allergies later in life).

Why does this happen and how do we work with this concept?

When we have a food intolerance, sensitivity, food allergy, or something as specific as celiac disease, we are speaking about something that has genetic implications, however it has been speculated that stress, mainly mental, can impact one’s ability to digest foods. While I personally have a healthy skepticism about this understanding, I can say with certainty that prolonged exposure to stress does absolutely cause unwanted long-term effects on our health, however these adaptations are not usually in relation to how food moves through our body, but instead how we are emotionally and physically (in pain, sad, tired / exhausted, unwilling, unfocused, more attracted to points of addiction / obsession).

When does this usually happen?

The cause and effect will be different per individual based on **genetics** (*from certain family member(s); Our genetics is a random chance of particular points from our parents genome*), **digestive** (in)ability, **a**mount of exposure (of the reactive food) to the cause and **a**ge (lactose intolerance usually gets worse with age). Avoidance is usually the best.

Who does this affect

Only around 35% of people worldwide can digest lactose, while celiac disease only affects about 1% of the western population (Harvard health, 2020). Food issues occur in a good majority of our population, and very rarely is a person ever able to eat everything without any issues. If you are this person, consider yourself very lucky!

Who is the best person to consider asking for advice if I believe I have an issue with digesting food?

Usually I would recommend a Dietitian, however I would need to mainly recommend speaking to your doctor first if you have any issues digesting food. From there, they should be able to run specific tests if necessary, then at that point avoidance will be the best, if not only way to avoid flareups or dietary reactions.

REFERENCES

Harvard Health (January 30, 2020). Food allergy, intolerance, or sensitivity: What's the difference, and why does it matter? - <https://www.health.harvard.edu/blog/food-allergy-intolerance-or-sensitivity-whats-the-difference-and-why-does-it-matter-2020013018736>